

## TAKE HEED.

"Wherewithal shall a young man keep his way pure [keep a clean course in life]? By taking heed thereto according to thy Word." – Psa. 119:9.

NEVER in all the centuries of the past was the exhortation to "take heed" as opportune as to-day, when the temperament of the age is aptly illustrated by its two great motive powers, steam and electricity. There is to-day more rush and force than thought and precision. The active brains of the world are scheming for fortunes and rushing to gain them; and very few in any condition of life take time to consider [R2146 : page 132] and to weigh and compare principles and motives of action, to see whether the ends for which they strive are worthy of their efforts. They rush and push and pull because the very conditions of their birth in this time impel them to do so, even though the end of their aspirations be but empty bubbles and bitter disappointments. And this, which is true of the world at large, is also true of the professed Christian Church: the active spirit of the age has permeated its pulpits, its pews and its theological schools. But this activity, partaking largely of the spirit of the world, has taken more of a business than of a pious turn, and tends more to the emphasizing of the forms of godliness than to the cultivation of its vital power, and more to worldly than to spiritual prosperity. It was of a similar class in the Jewish age that the Lord said, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." (Isa. 1:3.) Let the thoughtful Christian, therefore, look well to his course and see that he is steering it in exact harmony with the divine Word and plan.

The Psalmist, in the above text, suggests the most worthy ambition of life; *viz.*, to keep our course of life clean and free from the contaminations of this evil world. The suggestion is specially apt in its application to the young, whose tender years and inexperience have as yet learned little beyond the loving discipline of the home circle, which the text presupposes. Parental love, counsel, discipline, example and

prayers have thus far guided the youthful feet in the ways of righteousness and peace, and now, at the verge of manhood and womanhood, life's great work and its stern duties and responsibilities must be faced; the youth must come in contact, to some extent at least, with the wickedness of an ungodly world, where the metal of his character will be put to the test, and often to very crucial tests when it is discovered that the way of the ungodly prospers in the present time.

It is true, indeed, that the tendency of "evil communications" is to "corrupt good manners." (1 Cor. 15:33.) As the ear becomes accustomed to profanity and to unkind and bitter words, and the eye to sights of misery and injustice, the tendency is to blunt the finer sensibilities of the pure and good, so that in time the heart will become more or less calloused and unsympathetic, unless these unholy influences are steadily resisted and the ways of the world shunned.

But how, inquires the Psalmist, shall a young man keep his way (his course of life) clean? how, in his inexperience and lack of competent wisdom, shall he succeed, often single-handed and alone, in stemming the almost resistless current of evil about him? How can he prosper in business without resorting to the tricks of trade? how can he gain the desired places of social distinction or political preferment, if his course of life is continually against the current of the world's ideas and its means and methods? in other words, how can a man be in the world, and not of it?

That such a thing is both desirable and possible to the Christian is plain from our Lord's prayer for his disciples (John 17:15-17), "Holy Father,...I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest *keep them from the evil*. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them [separate them from the evil] through thy truth: thy Word is truth."

The Psalmist raises the question for the very purpose of suggesting the answer, and his answer is in full harmony with our Lord's prayer, not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be

kept from the evil, showing that the only way for a young man to keep his course of life clean is to take heed thereto according to the Word of the Lord. As the Apostle Paul also says, the "scriptures given by inspiration of God are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ...and are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." – 2 Tim. 3:15,16.

But the Scriptures nowhere show the Christian how to blend the spirit and methods of Christ with the spirit and methods of the world, in order to make what men call success in life. They do not open up the way to either financial, political or social success, but they do "teach us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope [of the gospel] and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people [not a people striving after the things of this world, but] zealous of good works." (Titus 2:12-14.) Yes, the young man who would follow Christ must forego the ambitions and pleasures of the present life, and live for the enduring and satisfying riches of the life to come.

But the Word of the Lord, full as it is of wisdom and counsel, cannot profit even the professed Christian who does not in a meek and prayerful spirit come to its pages for instruction. Nor does it profit the careless reader who fails to meditate upon its precepts, or who only occasionally looks into the perfect law of liberty and beholds himself, but straightway forgets what manner of man he was (Jas. 1:22-24), and therefore fails to apply the instruction. But he who can truly say, – "Thy words were found, and I did *eat them* [I appropriated them diligently to the building up of my character]; and thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;" "my delight is in the law [**R2146 : page 133**] of the Lord, and in his law do I meditate day and night; I meditate also of all thy work, O Lord, and talk of thy doings; I meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways; I delight myself in thy statutes, I do not forget thy word" (Jer. 15:16; Psa.

1:2; 77:12; 119:15,16): these, and only these, are ordering their steps aright, by *taking heed* to the Word of the Lord.

This was the course that Paul recommended to Timothy, that he might keep himself pure from worldly contamination, and be an example and faithful minister to others, saying, "Be thou *an example of the believers*, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity....Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all." – 1 Tim. 4:12,15.

The profiting certainly will not appear if the means are not thus used. Character cannot ripen except under proper conditions; and if professions abound where character is lacking, or is not correspondingly developed, how sad is the plight, and how manifest the self-deception to every discerning saint!

In view of these things, therefore, let the young Christian mark well the counsel of wisdom, and take heed to his course according to the Word of the Lord. Let him come to it for answers to all questions of right and duty; and let him study how the perfect law of God – the law of love – applies to all the conditions and circumstances of his daily life and associations and obligations. In so doing there cannot fail to be a steady growth in grace, and the fruits of the spirit will not be lacking.

But youth is not the only time when it is necessary to steer one's course by the Word of the Lord. While the only right way to start in life is by taking heed to our way according to God's Word, it is equally right and necessary to heed it and to meditate upon it to the very end of our days. A life thus spent becomes beautiful in old age, which should show all the fruits of the spirit tinged with the glow of ripeness, and be a loving benediction to all within the range of its influence. Indeed, what a pattern of godliness does every aged saint present when the hoary head is crowned with the beauty of holiness, when a long life of self-denial and self-discipline gives a practical demonstration of the power of divine grace to overcome the downward tendencies of our fallen nature! What a pattern should the aged Christian be, of patient

self-forgetfulness, of loving sympathy and gentle forbearance, able to give kindly counsel and timely assistance in various ways to those who are still bearing the burden and heat of the day, cheering them onward and inspiring them to noble deeds and persistent fortitude, [R2147 : page 133] and fully appreciating all their labors of love!

But, alas! the well-spent lives are few. How few have remembered their Creator in the days of their youth, and from youth to age have taken heed to their way according to God's Word! In many cases youth has been worse than wasted in sowing "wild oats," and subsequent years have reaped the bitter harvest; life's discipline has been endured with murmuring and chafing, the disposition has grown sour, and life a tiresome burden. Alas! too often, even among professed Christians, has the failure to "take heed" permitted the unholy passions to flourish to the great detriment of all spiritual progress, until at last but little remains except empty professions which bring only dishonor upon the name of Christ. Such is the result of a mere start in the Christian life with little or no endeavor thereafter to develop Christian character according to God's Word. Yet God is gracious, and he is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, so that at whatever point in its downward way or its backslidden course, whether in youth or age, the soul halts and changes its course from the paths of sin to the paths of faith and righteousness, there the love of God is made manifest in pardon and peace, and the operations of divine grace are realized in helps and encouragements to pursue the upward way. But, at whatever point we start in the Christian life, from that starting point begins the duty of diligently taking heed to our way according to God's Word. If we grow careless of this duty, and heedlessly blunder along according to our own understanding, meditating upon our own likes and dislikes, our selfish preferences, or our own depraved tastes and ideas, instead of upon the precepts and principles of God's Word, and endeavoring to bring our own ideas and ways to that standard of righteousness day by day and year by year, – if such be the listless, shiftless indifference that marks our course, we cannot hope to retain the divine favor; nor can

we grow in grace and approximate more and more the likeness of Christ.

The spiritual life, like the physical life, develops according to fixed laws. As the natural life must be nourished and fed according to the laws of nature in order to sustain and develop it and keep it in health, so the spiritual life must be nourished by the various means of grace and fed continually by the Word of the Lord. – "Thy words were found, and I did eat them."

If, then, we realize that, through any measure of neglect, we are out of the way and find in ourselves a low state of spiritual health, let us bestir ourselves to redoubled diligence. No matter how long we may have walked in a blundering way, the Lord stands ready with his grace to help and his presence to cheer as soon as we turn with our whole heart unto him in earnest desire and determination by his grace to overcome. "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking [R2147 : page 134] guile. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry." But "the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.... The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." – Psa. 34:13-16,18.

M. F. RUSSELL.

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